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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 002975

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/04/2015
TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MASS](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [PK](#) [SA](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: CENTCOM DEPUTY COMMANDER GENERAL SMITH VISITS UAE

REF: A. BERN 1122
[1](#)B. ABU DHABI 2946

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: CENTCOM Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Smith met July 2 with UAE Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Mohammed Al Kaabi and UAE Air Force and Air Defense Commander Staff Pilot Major General Khaled Al Buainnan. Smith briefed Al Kaabi on international troop deployments in both Afghanistan and Iraq in the run-up to their respective elections, and thanked the UAE for its contributions to security and stability in both countries. Smith and Al Kaabi agreed that land borders -- whether Iraq's or the UAE's -- remain vulnerable to smugglers and infiltrators and require greater protection. Al Kaabi noted the mounting tensions between the UAE and Saudi Arabia that are in part related to an unresolved border dispute. Smith and Al Buainnan reviewed the status of the UAE's Gulf Air Warfare Center, training needs, and the F-16 Block 60 fighter aircraft program. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 2, CENTCOM Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Smith, accompanied by the Ambassador, Acting USLO Chief, and Pol Chief (notetaker) met with UAE Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Al Kaabi. Al Kaabi was accompanied by Brigadier Obaid Al Hairi Salem Al Ketbi, Director of General Purchasing, and Jack McGuinness, advisor to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed.

¶3. (C) The bulk of the discussion concerned Afghanistan, Iraq, and UAE-Saudi border tensions. Al Kaabi expressed his condolences for the 16 American service members in Afghanistan who died June 28 when their MH-47 helicopter crashed as they attempted to reinforce a small number of U.S. Special Forces. Al Kaabi, who has twice been to Afghanistan to visit the UAE's Special Operations forces, and is familiar with its mountainous terrain, said he understood how insurgents in hiding could have employed a rocket-propelled grenade to down the helicopter. Smith thanked the UAE for contributing its own Special Forces to Operation Enduring Freedom and for training a Bahraini Special Forces contingent to serve alongside them in Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) Smith said he expected more violence in Afghanistan in the run-up to the September election. If the remnant Taliban forces do not succeed in disrupting the election, "it's over for them," he said. Already, 163 mid-level Taliban leaders have indicated they are "ready for conciliation." Some of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's followers are ready to reconcile as well, he added. Al Kaabi said the Taliban did not have another option. He noted that some Afghan expatriates with Taliban sympathies living in Al Ain in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi had to be stopped from trying to create their own legal system. Smith said the Taliban tried to re-establish themselves in the Kandahar area by taking over a village and establishing their own laws. The government had to "go in and take it back." Al Kaabi also said that President Karzai continued to view Pakistanis with suspicion. "He sees a Pakistani behind every tree."

¶5. (C) Smith briefed Al Kaabi on efforts to train the Afghan National Army, saying that 22,000 troops have received training to date, with a goal of training 70,000 troops by ¶2007. The challenge is finding suitable military leadership, he said. Al Kaabi said if the U.S. provides the training and then turns over the military command to the Afghans, the Afghans "will find their way." The U.S. is doing exactly that through "embedded training teams," Smith said. Prior to the September election, there will be a troop increase, including one battalion each from Spain, the Netherlands, the UK, and the U.S., and three from NATO. Those forces will stay on the ground for 90 days during the election period. After the election, if possible, the U.S. will reduce the number of its conventional forces slightly, Smith said.

¶6. (C) Parenthetically, the Ambassador noted the strong relationship between the UAE and Pakistan (President Musharraf recently traveled to Abu Dhabi to meet with President Khalifa and senior leaders). Al Kaabi, who spent seven months training in Peshawar earlier in his career, nodded in agreement and proceeded to describe the challenges of combatting the weapons and drug trade in the Pakistani-Afghan border areas.

DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAQ

¶7. (C) Smith also briefed Al Kaabi on the situation in Iraq, noting that 170,000 Iraqi troops had been trained and equipped to date, with the goal of training 200,000 troops by October 2005, and 205,000 troops by January 2006. He said that the First Brigade in Baghdad is operating independently and is in control of some difficult neighborhoods. An additional 22 battalions are within a few months of becoming independent, he said. Iraqi troops are fighting successfully in Mosul and Fallujah, and are fighting in the Tigris and

Euphrates valleys where U.S. forces believe some of the insurgent leadership is located and where Iraqis have helped find weapons caches. Smith said the U.S. would probably increase its forces by a brigade for the October 2005 constitutional referendum and the December 2005 election, and only begin to reduce forces after January 2006. Smith said that U.S. forces serving on "transition teams" embedded with the Iraqi military are a success story. Once the Iraqis say they are ready to take over, the U.S. forces will leave, he said.

BORDER SECURITY) A CHALLENGE FOR IRAQIS AND EMIRATIS

18. (C) Al Kaabi identified weak border security as a major challenge in Iraq and the UAE. Smith recalled telling California Congressman Duncan Hunter, who had asked him whether having another U.S. division would secure Iraq's borders, that border security was not something land forces could do well. Smith said the problem in Iraq was that the thousands of persons coming across the border from Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia "appear to be legal." Some may be using forged documents. The authorities do not have any biomedical data that could help them determine who should and should not be admitted to Iraq. Smith said that smugglers along the Iraq-Syria border were sophisticated tunnel builders, burrowing under berms and digging holes under fences. Some prisoners in Iraq have employed ingenious techniques in an attempt to dig escape tunnels, he said.

19. (C) Al Kaabi drew parallels with the UAE's border with Saudi Arabia, and noted that there were currently 10 firms building a wall along the entire UAE border in an attempt to stop smuggling and illegal immigration. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2005. Apparently prepared to discuss the topic of UAE-Saudi border tension, Al Kaabi produced a photo book containing illustrations of the UAE-Saudi border, the wall that is under construction, and the UAE frontier troops deployed there. In response to the Ambassador's question, Al Kaabi said the Saudis were building up their border forces as well. Al Kaabi said the UAE has witnessed the same determination by smugglers trying to enter into the UAE, or trying to smuggle drugs into the UAE.

IRANIAN INFLUENCE ON IRAQ

110. (C) Al Kaabi said Iran was trying to influence Iraqi internal affairs, but he personally did not think Iran posed as much of a threat as Hizbollah in Lebanon. Smith said the U.S. remains wary about the Iranians and Iranian influence on SCIRI and Moqtada Al Sadr. However, he said that he was not that concerned that Iran would influence the new Iraqi government. In Smith's view, Grand Ayattolah Ali Sistani was having a positive influence on the Iraqi political scene and did not appear to be interested in a close relationship with Iran. Al Kaabi said to rule Iraq, you have to be tough, and that Iraqis were accustomed to having tough rulers. Smith replied that the U.S. believes a representative government could work in Iraq. Al Kaabi agreed, noting that Shi'a moderate Iyad Allawi could be a visionary leader who would not play the sectarian card. (Note: Allawi remains a frequent visitor to Abu Dhabi. Al Kaabi indicated that the had met Allawi during the latter's most recent visit.)

REBUILDING IRAQ

111. (C) Smith said that the new Iraqi ministers of defense and interior had been performing well and were determined to protect the country's oil and power infrastructure. He cited an Iraqi opinion poll that found most Iraqis were more concerned about having electricity, water, and jobs than they were about security. Al Kaabi said Iraq would be an important country in about five years' time and that its highly educated population would be an asset. Smith said that Iraqis had a good work ethic, but Saddam had neglected the infrastructure in favor of building palaces instead of

maintaining water treatment plants, power plants, and oil wells.

¶12. (C) Al Kaabi said that Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed had instructed him to ask Smith how the UAE could be helpful in Iraq. Smith said that Iraqis needed basic computer and communications training, as well as a modernized banking system, to make up for the years of neglect under Saddam. Smith said one of the legacies of Saddam's time was that one-third of the Iraqi armed forces are on leave at any given time because soldiers and officers need time to collect their pay and return to their villages and take care of their families' needs. Al Kaabi inquired about the status of members of Saddam's army and police. Smith said that many of the current police chiefs and officers were former army officers, and that the desertion problem has declined. He acknowledged that it would take time for the Iraqi Transitional Government to allow former Saddam officials to fill leadership positions. Former Republican Guard members are still not acceptable to the new Iraqi leadership, Smith said. During the exchange, Al Kaabi confirmed that the Swiss government had finally approved the transfer of more than 150 M-113 Armed Personnel Carriers to Iraq via the UAE (ref A).

UAE AIR FORCE UPDATE

¶13. (C) Smith, accompanied by Ambassador and Acting USLO Chief, also met July 2 with UAE Air Force and Air Defense Commander Major General Khaled Al Buainnan. Khaled opened by noting the UAE's interest in building a high-speed rail line to Qatar. The project, part of a planned causeway, is opposed by the Saudis because it bypasses the kingdom, Khaled said.

¶14. (U) The UAE-Qatar causeway plan is one aspect of the mounting tension between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over their common boundaries. The dispute dates back to a 1974 Border Agreement in which the UAE relinquished to Saudi Arabia a 25-kilometer coastal area known as Khor Al Adeed, separating Abu Dhabi and Qatar, and also relinquished 80 percent of the giant Zararah/Shaybah oil field (ref B). Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed told NEA PDAS Cheney during her June 26 visit that he would travel to Riyadh in July to meet again with Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef to follow up on Nayef's June 19 visit to Abu Dhabi, but he was not optimistic about those talks.

¶15. (C) Smith inquired about the UAE's F-16 Block 60 "Desert Falcon" fighter aircraft, the first batch of which was delivered on May 3. Khaled expressed his satisfaction on this achievement. They reviewed operational, maintenance, and training issues related to the fighter aircraft. In discussing the UAE Desert Falcon program, Khaled stated that MBZ directed that only Lieutenants and Captains be assigned to fly the aircraft, no one higher. All who have entered training with the exception of senior squadron leadership have been Captains, some of whom have since been promoted to Major while in training. Khaled stated he had 61 pilots already trained (F-16 basic training provided by Turkey and the USAF, not Block 60 training) all of whom were First Lieutenants or Captains. When asked about aircraft maintenance, Khaled noted UAE plans for long term follow-on support. He acknowledged the UAEAF need for a dedicated FMS case but was non-committal on when he intended to pursue such support.

¶16. (C) Khaled further requested the U.S. Navy's participation in future Gulf Air Warfare Center classes, UAE Air Force hosted exercises, and with US Navy ships in the Gulf. Khaled indicated a strong desire for participation of AWACs or E-2C participation as well in future GAWC classes. Khaled concluded by asking for CENTCOM support in providing valuable air-to-air refueling operations to help his pilots maintain their currency. Acting USLO Chief pointed out to Khaled that it was necessary to conclude the bilateral

Acquisition Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) to help facilitate refueling operations. Staff Pilot Col. Mahash Al Hameli, Chief of UAE Air Force Intelligence and Security, who also attended the meeting, acknowledged that the ACSA was key to going forward on the UAEAF aerial refueling operation request. Khaled indicated his desire to have this agreement concluded soon. As of July 3, to the Embassy's knowledge, ACSA was still in the interagency clearance process.

Comment:

¶17. (C) It was unusual for two UAE senior military officers to be making points about the UAE-Saudi border dispute, a political topic recently raised by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed during NEA PDAS Cheney's June 26 visit (ref B). That Al Kaabi would produce a photo book showing the UAE's frontier corps on the border and construction of the wall, and that Khaled would mention the rail and causeway projects at the start of his meeting, are indications that UAEG officials are wanting to get their position out to a broader audience (septel to follow). The local press has been giving the issue prominent coverage in recent days.
SISON